



Intimate Partner Violence in People Who are Non-Cisgender and/or Heterosexual

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People who conceal their sexual or gender identity commonly avoid disclosing details of their intimate relationships. This can mean that

LGBTQ+ people experience intimate relationships in ways that their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts do not. Meyer's Minority Stress Theory¹ suggests that stressors



Figure 1 Photograph by Alexander Grey:
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-with-body-painting-1209843/>. CCO.

compound the mental and overall health of LGBTQ+ people. In turn, this impacts intimate relationships with partners. On top of the stigma that LGBTQ+ people face, they can face even more stress due to this reluctance of disclosing IPV.

“[There are] a number of areas that may outline the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ young adults (e.g., considering their relationship and IPV experiences as private, and the potential influence of minority stress factors on the decision to disclose physical IPV victimization).”

We assessed minority stress among LGBTQ+ students. We wanted to know who students typically went to and avoided and why when disclosing intimate partner violence (IPV) involving physical harm.

Highlights

Social stigma puts LGBTQ+ people at a greater risk for IPV.

IPV is under-reported in all groups, and this may be particularly true in the LGBTQ+ community.

IPV can present differently in the LGBTQ+ community and therefore explicit and inclusive training for behavioral health professionals is needed.

Methods

Seventy-seven LGBTQ+ college students (ages 18-25) in the United States participated in our study. Most participants identified as gay men and lesbian women. The study was conducted through a 30-minute online survey. Participants were asked about the nature of their IPV victimization, the frequency of those incidents, if the incident was disclosed, and to whom it was disclosed.

Results

- Participants reported a range of 1-108 incidents of IPV with an average of 12 incidents.
- Roughly 1/3rd of participants disclosed incidents of violence.
- Of those who disclosed, all did so with at least one informal support, citing LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ friends. Almost 8% percent reported the incidents to a formal support, commonly represented as counselors or therapists.
- Reasons for nondisclosure include perceptions that the incident was not substantial enough to report, the incident was a private matter, and fear of others' reactions. Some participants reported not having formal support available to which they could report.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychologists can investigate how different communities uniquely experience relationships and personal situations and shed light on how external social stigma compounds IPV.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: IPV victimization occurs at high rates amongst LGBTQ+ college students. Our work could be replicated in a broader population to assess if our findings are generalizable to other age groups as well, or if their help-seeking experiences are different.

Practice: Most formal disclosures were made to therapists and counselors. Institutions of higher education must be inclusive of LGBTQ+ students and their unique experiences. Those working in behavioral health within university/college settings must understand the dynamic amongst students who may already lack social support due to a lack of friends or being further from family to support LGBTQ+ college students in managing their intimate relationships.

Social Action: Those in advocacy must decrease the factors that compound minority stress in LGBTQ+ people. By doing so, mental health struggles will be reduced, boosting healthier relationships with loved ones.

*Original Citation: Sylaska, K. M., & Edwards, K. M. (2015). Disclosure experiences of sexual minority college student victims of intimate partner violence. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 55(3-4), 326–335. Terms of use: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License It is attributed to the authors and the original version can be found here: <https://www.communitypsychology.com/intimate-partner-violence-in-people-who-are-non-cisgender-and-or-heterosexual/>*

¹ Meyer I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological bulletin*, 129(5), 674–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>